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THE INADEQUACY OF IMPERSONAL IDEAS OF GOD

by

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PREFACE

In the writing of this thesis no attempt has been made to solve the problem of God. It is not man's attempt to understand God that I am concerned with, for to admit "God's existence is to solve half the problem." It is the denial of God as personality that concerns the writer. For to deny that God is a living, personal Being, in my judgement, is to deny the existence of God. A God who is less than a personal Being, and therefore less than man, is no God at all.

The "Inadequacy of Impersonal Ideas of God," is a thesis which needs no defense. Merely to state the impersonal ideas of God is largely to show their inadequacy. But to set them over against the Christian view of God, which I have tried to do, is to reveal their true nature. The adequacy of the personal God of love revealed to us through Jesus Christ proves the inadequacy of all the impersonal ideas of abstract philosophy.

CHAPTER

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I. THE APPROACH TO GOD

Three constants are ever present in human experience and history. These are the universe, man, and their Maker. Science psychology, and religion present the conclusions men have reached in respect to them. The history of human progress is a record of change and advancement with reference to these fundamentals with which we must constantly deal.

The universe as it first appeared to the eye of man was conceived as earth-centered, with sun and moon and stars all revolving around it. The earth itself was regarded as four-cornered and flat. The microscope and the telescope enlarged man's view of the world and changed his conception regarding it. The knowledge which has come to men through the comprehension of natural laws and forces, as they have been revealed through the study of the various sciences, have changed the world from a thing of magic and beauty to a home for the progressive development of man. This conception of the universe has literally given wings to human progress in the perfection of the airplane. It has placed at man's disposal forces and capacities unlimited in their possibilities of service to human life and progress.

A parallel change in concept is noted too respecting the second of these constants. Man has always been present since the

dawn of human history as the second number of this trinity of fundamentals. But his view of himself and of his relationship to the other two constants has undergone progressive development as history has unfolded his nature to him and revealed his latent powers. It appears that man was in the beginning the plaything and pawn of the universe in which he found himself. He did not understand physical laws, and consequently was unable to control natural forces of the universe in which he existed. On the physical side he found himself identical with the material substance that constituted the earth. And it took him long centuries to differentiate himself by recognition of his divine nature from the physical universe. We ought not to be harsh in our judgment of the human race because of this disparaging view of it, because we now know that the normal man weighing one hundred and fifty pounds is chemically valued at ninety-eight cents. Primitive man did not know much about the substance of the body. It has taken modern chemistry to inform us respecting the chemical elements that constitute the human body.

It was impossible for man to climb far up the ladder of human progress, however, until he was satisfied that though related to the physical world, through his body, he himself in his essential being is vastly superior to the universe of things and to the plant and animal life surrounding him. The story that records this differentiation is a long one. But in due process of

time the concept prevailed that man is essentially spiritual and that he is a little ^{lower} than God. This conviction as to his worthwhileness and dignity made possible the utilization of the knowledge of the universe he had gleaned and the mastery of the forces he had discovered. The limitations on human progress were removed far more decidedly by man's growing appreciation of his own spiritual endowment than by his discovery of the nature, forces, and laws of the physical world. It would be more nearly correct to say that man's discovery of his spiritual resources directly conditioned and made possible his mastery of physical forces, for until he became convinced of his spiritual lordship in the universe, there was no inner urge impelling him to the understanding of the world or to the comprehension of methods of using his knowledge of it.

With respect to God we find a parallel situation. As we look back over the records of human history and read through archaeological relics we cannot help but see the changing and expanding conceptions men have successively entertained of God. And we cannot but be convinced that humanity owes more of its progress and development to the orientation of God in human life than to any other force, power, or influence. The monstrosities and absurdities perpetrated on humanity in the name of religion and as constituting the service and worship of God appal us. But we must not forget that these rites, incantations, spells, rituals, customs, and ceremonies were serious business for the spiritually benighted

men and women who practised them with the firm conviction that they pleased God in their performance. The evolution of religion from its primitive forms through animism, totemism, ancestor-worship, polytheism, henotheism, on to monotheism is a brilliant record of advancing conceptions. It portrays for us the marvelous upreach and outreach of the human spirit in its progressive effort to understand the Maker of the universe and of man. Every one of these successive steps in the development of man's religious conceptions has conditioned and limited God, and the influence of these conditions and limitations on the Divine has been in every instance a shackle, a manacle on the free expression of the human spirit.

Of these advancing conceptions of God theism is the highest and most commonly accepted view. "Theism, from the Greek word for God, is the term applied to the common belief in God as a personal, spiritual being with whom it is possible to come into intimate relations."¹ Lofty as this conception is, in its true sense, it became an attempt to prove the existence of God.

Four of these arguments or proofs have had a long history. The first is the Cosmological, or the argument from the existence of the universe. The fact that the universe exists implies a cause or creator. How can we account for it in any other way? Nothing

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G. T. W. Patrick, The World and Its Meaning, p. 169.

just happens. There must be something which made it happen. But even if we grant that there is a cause adequate to produce the result which is apparent to us, it does not mean that we may assert any significant thing about that cause. All we are justified in saying is that something caused this thing to take place. What is this "something," this cause? If we say that it can be nothing less than a personal God who willed to create the universe, it may be true, as many of us believe, but what right have we to do so on the basis of the facts before us? Are we not reading into our conclusion more than the facts justify? There may be a personal Creator, but it is going beyond the evidence with which we started to make such a declaration. There is nothing to compel us to come to that conclusion.

Now let us look at the Teleological argument, that from design. All around us there are evidences of adaptation to ends. Things are as they are because they were designed to fit into the scheme of things. Everywhere we see design. Can there be design without a Designer? That is the argument. It was put far more crudely in the eighteenth century, before the doctrine of evolution spoiled the nicety of the adaptations which were claimed for a Designer who at the very beginning constructed each organ to perform its appropriate function. Since the evolutionary hypothesis has been so widely accepted the argument has changed form. Instead of minute adaptations which could be pointed to as the work of an

original Designer a more general adaptation has to be asserted. The whole universe was so planned that as it developed adaptations would take place as they became necessary in nature and in human life. But in either case the doubt rises in one's mind again whether more is not read into the conclusion than the premises justify. There are adaptations innumerable; the very universe itself is what may be called a mutual universe, working together part with part as a reciprocating unity. Does this, however, make it altogether inevitable that we should conclude that a personal Being is responsible for it? It may seem to be reasonable to one who already believes in a personal God, but that is a very different matter from claiming that we have a proof which a sane man can only disregard with peril. Design surely implies that there is something which makes it possible for adaptation to take place, but does it necessarily demand belief in a personal Designer who is responsible for it all?

The third of the arguments is the Ontological. It has been put in a number of ways. Briefly stated it is this, that the presence in the mind of man of the conception of God is proof that such a God exists as an objective reality. As a formal argument it is a failure, and so cannot be used as a proof of the being of God. But this does not mean that the argument is of no use. It is helpful, as the two arguments previously presented are helpful, in giving a certain confidence to those who in other ways have arrived at the conclusion that there is a God. When one is so convinced it is quite natural

that the presence of the God-idea in his mind will be accounted for by the presence of such a Being in the universe. But the point which is most salutary for everyone to see with great clearness is that all these arguments fail to compel belief in God among those who are not otherwise convinced. They may be helpful but they are not convincing; they point one to a most restful and satisfying conclusion, but they do not infallibly demonstrate the truth toward which they seem to move.

There is still another argument which has had a long history, the Anthropological, the argument from the moral nature of man. And, although we must say the same of this argument as of the others so far as proof is concerned, we can readily use it as a helpful means to the assurance of God.

As a matter of fact, belief in God does not depend upon argument; it depends upon experience. It is the contribution of religion rather than of philosophy, and is based upon the experience of religious need and its satisfaction. "Schleiermacher began right when he suggested substituting for the so-called theistic proofs an appeal to the universal human consciousness of absolute dependence. We are all aware, in that immediate cognitive experience which we sometimes vaguely call "feeling," that we are absolutely dependent, and in this consciousness is included an immediate apprehension of God. In recognizing our absolute dependence there is included a recognition of a Reality upon which we are absolutely dependent, and that Reality,

whether we can learn anything about it or not, is God, the God of universal experimental religion. This is where theistic thought should always begin."²

In human personality we find the approach to God. Personalism takes its stand firmly upon the uncontested fact of personality. The one thing which I cannot doubt is the existence of myself as a person and a member of a society of persons. "This approach to the Divine Person through the human person is the Newer Theism."³ "From persons to a Person, from incomplete personality to Perfect Personality, - this is the path to an incontrovertible theism."⁴

Theism, considered in this way, signifies not only that there is a ground or cause of all things, but also that the Cause of all things is a Personal Being, of whom an image is presented in the human personality. The characteristics of personality are freedom, self-consciousness, self-determination, and moral responsibility.

In sense-perception external objects are brought directly to our knowledge. Through sensations compared and combined by reason, we perceive outward things in their qualities and relations. There are perceptions of the spirit as well as of sense. The Apostle

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D. C. MacIntosh, The Reasonableness of Christianity, p. 74f.

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J. W. Buckham, Personality and the Christian Ideal, p. 207.

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Ibid., p. 206.

Paul clearly shows this when he says, "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God . . . neither can he know them,
because they are spiritually discerned."⁵ As the soul, on the basis of sensations, posits the outer world of sense, so, on the basis of analogous inward experiences, it posits God. The inward feelings, yearnings, aspirations of the soul are the ground of the spiritual perception.

It is through the feeling of dependence and the feeling of obligation that the existence of a Supreme Being in whom we live, and to whose law we are subject, is revealed to the soul. And intimately connected with the recognition of this Being is a tendency to rest upon and hold converse with Him. Self is distinguished from God, as from the world. There is no identification of the self with God. It is the consciousness of self as dependent as well as free, which involves communion with God. And this tendency to commune with God is inseparable from the recognition of Him. To pray to Him, to worship Him, are native and spontaneous movements of the human spirit. Man feels drawn to the Being who reveals himself to him. Augustine voiced it thus: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee."

Belief in the personality of man, and belief in the personality of God, stand or fall together. The history of religion seems to show that these two beliefs are for some reason inseparable. Where faith in the personality of God is weak or altogether wanting, as in the case of pantheism, the perception which men have of their own personality is found to be in an equal degree indistinct. The soul is merely phenomenal. Philosophical theories which substitute matter, or an "Unknowable," for the self-conscious Deity, likewise dissipate the personality of man. If they deny that God is a Person, they deny with equal emphasis that man is a person. Out of man's perception of his own personal nature arises the belief in a personal God. On this fact of our own personality rests the belief in the personality of God. God is a Person. Therefore all impersonal ideas of God are inadequate.

II. IMPERSONAL IDEAS OF GOD

1. Pantheism.

"Pantheism, from two Greek words meaning all and God, is the doctrine that God is all and all is God; God is identical with Nature or with the world."¹ It differs from atheism in holding to something besides and beneath finite things, - an all-pervading Cause or Essence. It differs from deism in denying that God is separate from the world, and that the world is sustained and guided by energies imparted from without, though inherent in it. It does not differ from theism in affirming the immanence of God, for this theism likewise teaches. But it differs from theism in denying to the immanent Power personal consciousness and will, and an existence independent of the world. With the denial of will and conscious intelligence, pantheism excludes design or final causes. Finite things emerge into being, and pass away, and the course of nature proceeds through the perpetual operation of an agency which takes no cognizance of its work except so far as it may arrive at self-consciousness in man.

In the system of Spinoza, the most celebrated and influential of modern pantheists, it is asserted that there is but one substance.

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G. T. W. Patrick, The World and Its Meaning, p. 169.

This substance was endowed with an infinite number of attributes. In defining God Spinoza had a right to put into his theoretical construction as many attributes as he pleased, though he admits that only two are known to us, namely, thought and extension. If you give God an infinity of attributes but say that only two are known to us, then to all intents and purposes God is the sum of all the forms of thought and extension in the universe. This was Spinoza's pantheism.

The question then arises, what is the relation of thought and extension to each other? Both being manifestations of a simple identical essence, the order of existence is parallel to the order of thought. All individual things are modes of one or other of the attributes, that is, of the substance as far as it is discerned by us. There is a complete correspondence or harmony, although there is no reciprocal influence, between bodies and minds. But the modes do not make up the substance, which is prior to them; they are transient as ripples on the surface of the sea. The imagination regards them as entities; but reason looks beneath them to the eternal essence of which they are but a fleeting manifestation.

To Spinoza religion was the intellectual love of God. But this could not mean much when we remember that with him God simply means the great totality of which man is a part. His ethics, however, was an admirable system in which he commended love as the true foundation of proper relations between man and man.

"Spinoza's unqualified determinism," says Francis L. Patton, "in any event would have marred his religious faith. For if we suppose that in a complicated mechanism, a portion of that mechanism had the power of examining it to see how it was made, it could not escape the consciousness that it was part of the mechanism, that it thought only as it was antecedently determined to think, that its belief was a deterministic belief and its doubt a deterministic doubt; and that, as antecedently determined, it might disbelieve its beliefs and doubt its doubts. But for all that, if Spinoza's theology had been as consistent as his ethics, he might have reached a conception of things concerning which, after the analogy of body and mind, he might have said: 'All are but parts of one stupendous whole, Whose body nature is, and God the soul.'²"

The great weakness in Spinoza's system, however, is the fact that he fails to prove that only one substance can exist, and that no other substance can be brought into being which is capable of self-activity, though dependent for the origin and continuance of its existence upon another.

The ideal pantheism of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, pursues a different path. It undertakes to unveil the Absolute Being, and from the Absolute to trace the evolution of all concrete existences, mental and material. The Absolute in Fichte is the universal ego, of

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Francis L. Patton, Fundamental Christianity, p. 26f.

which individual minds, together with external things, the objects of thoughts, are the phenomenal product. The universal ego is void of consciousness, and of which it is impossible to form a conception. Schelling, in his attempt to avoid idealism, made the Absolute the point of indifference and common basis of subject and object. For the perception of this impersonal Deity, which is assumed to be indefinable and not an object of thought, he postulated an impossible faculty of intellectual intuition, wherein the individual escapes from himself, and soars above the conditions or essential limits of conscious thinking. Hegel, starting like Schelling with the assumption that subject and object, thought and thing, are identical, ventures on the bold emprise of setting down all the successive stages through which thought in its absolute or most general form, by means of a kind of momentum assumed to inhere in it, develops the entire chain of concepts up to the point where, in the brain of the philosopher, the universe thus constituted attains to complete self-consciousness. In the logic of Hegel, we are told, the universe reveals itself to the spectator with no aid from experience in the process of its self-unfolding. The complex organism of thought, which is identical with the world of being, evolves itself under his eye.

There is difficulty, to begin with, in this self-evolving of "the idea." Motion is presupposed, and motion is a conception derived from experience. Moreover, few critics at present would con-

tend that all the links in this metaphysical chain are forged of solid metal. There are breaks which are filled up with an unsubstantial substitute for it. It is an ideal skeleton of a universe. Its value is at best hypothetical and negative. If a world were to exist, and to be rationally framed, it might possibly be conformed to this conception or outline. Whether the world is a reality, experience alone can determine. The highest merit which can be claimed for the ideal scheme of Hegel is such as belongs to the plans of an architect as they are conceived in his mind, before a beginning has been made of the edifice.

Independently of other difficulties in the way of the various theories of pantheism which have been propounded in ancient and modern times, it is a sufficient refutation of them that they stand in contradiction to consciousness, and that they are at variance with conscience. It is through self-consciousness that our first notion of substance and of unity is derived. The manifold operations of thought, feeling, imagination, memory, affection, consciously proceed from a single source within. The mind is revealed to itself as a separate, substantial, undivided entity. Pantheism, in resolving personal being into a mere phenomenon, or transient phase of an impersonal essence, and in abolishing the gulf of separation between the subject and the object, clashes with the first and clearest affirmation of consciousness.

Every system of pantheism is deterministic. It is vain to say that there is freedom of the will where there is no constraint from without. A plant growing out of a seed would not become free by becoming conscious. The determinism which refers all voluntary action to a force within which is capable of moving only on one line, incapable of alternative action, is equivalent to fatalism, in its bearing on responsibility at least. On this theory, moral accountableness is an illusion. No distinction is left between natural history and moral history. Pantheism sweeps away the absolute antithesis between good and evil, the perception of which is the very life of conscience. Under that philosophy, evil is normal no matter where it occurs. Evil, when viewed in all its relations, is good. It appears to be the opposite of good only when it is contemplated in a more restricted relation, and from a point of view too confined. Such a judgment respecting moral evil undermines morality, in theory at least. If it were acted upon it would corrupt society. It would dissolve the bonds of obligation. In the proportion in which the unperverted moral sense corresponds to the reality of things, to that extent is pantheism in all of its forms disproved.

The inadequacy of a pantheistic idea of God is obvious. A system of thought that denies personality, resolving it into a mere phenomenon or impersonal essence, can be nothing else but inadequate. Only as we distinguish between the subject and ob-

ject can we find a sure foundation for belief in God. We agree with Borden P. Bowne whey he says: "Pantheism in whatever form is untenable. Both its doctrine of God and its doctrine of man are equally obnoxious to criticism. It is equally fatal to reason to subject God to necessity, and to reduce man to a phantom of the infinite. Indeed this doctrine is less a matter of thought than of vague feeling. In a time of mechanical deism and religious anthropomorphism, pantheism naturally arises as a reaction. In a time of overdone mechanism and materialism it is welcomed as a relief. In a time when the Living God has retreated into a distant past and disappeared below the horizon, pantheism seems an advance. But this is a mistake. What is really needed is, not a God who blocks existence by absorbing all things into himself, but the living and immanent God in whom we live and move and have our being, and whose tender mercies are over all his works; a God also in whom revelation and mystery mingle, who comes near enough for love, and rises high enough for awe and voiceless adoration. It is only a mind subject to verbal illusions that can find any help or inspiration in pantheism proper. India and the Indian pantheon reveal the essential meaning of pantheism."³

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Borden P. Bowne, Theism, p. 219f.

2. Positivism.

Positivism is the antipode of pantheistic philosophy. So far from laying claim to omniscience, it goes to the other extreme of disclaiming all knowledge of the origin of things or of their interior nature. A fundamental principle of positivism, as expounded by Comte, is the ignoring of both efficient and final causes.

So far as the positive philosophy involved anything distinctive or original, it has had its day, and is now seldom mentioned but with contempt. It is needless to dwell upon its misconceptions and inconsistencies and show how, in professing to rest itself upon an impregnable basis of fact, it either ignored or denied the most universal and best attested facts of human experience. As a mere theory, it is not in harmony with itself. It is, to a considerable extent, a materialistic theory; but so far as it involved materialism it denies positivism. For positivism asserts that we can know only phenomena; but materialism implies that matter is more than a phenomenon. Again, if as Comte asserted, we know merely phenomena, we can have no warrant for saying that phenomena which we call mental can be resolved into phenomena which we call physical. We can only say that they are coexistent or successive. We have a direct and immediate knowledge of mental phenomena. We are as sure of their existence as we can be of any material phenomenon. A system which asserts that objects of sense are the only phenomena known contra-

dicts the positive testimony of human consciousness.

Not only is the positive philosophy inconsistent, it is incomplete. It does not follow into the logical conclusions from its own premises. For if the senses are our sole means of knowing, then our only real knowledge must be sensations. But sensations are simply states of consciousness; that is, they are phenomena, not of matter, but of mind. Therefore, if we know only phenomena, it is not material but mental phenomena that we know. Hence if we accept this system we are logically bound to discard not only belief in God, but belief in the reality of any external world. A permanent possibility of sensations is all that we have left. Nor can we stop even here, for mind cannot be identified with its phenomena. If we know only phenomena we know only a series of states of consciousness. We have no right to go beyond these. We have no right to reason respecting the mysterious thread which holds these states of consciousness together. Hence positivism must give up both matter and mind. So that the reasoning which undertakes to prove that we can know nothing about God, if pushed to its logical consequences, proves that we cannot know anything at all.

The law of three successive states, - the religious, the metaphysical, and the positive, - which Comte asserted to belong to the history of thought, - this law, in the form in which it was proclaimed by Comte, is without foundation in historical fact. Belief in a personal God has co-existed, and does now co-exist, in connection

with a belief in second causes, and loyalty to the maxims of inductive investigation.

Mill, while adhering to the proposition that we know only phenomena, attempted to rescue the positivist scheme from scepticism by holding to something exterior to us, which is "the permanent possibility of sensations," and by speaking of "a thread of consciousness." But matter cannot be made a something which produces sensations, without giving up the positivist denial both of causation and of our knowledge of anything save phenomena. Nor is it possible to speak of a "thread of consciousness," if there be nothing in the mind but successive states of consciousness. Mill was bound by a logical necessity to deny the existence of anything except mental sensations, - phenomena of his own individual consciousness. If he overstepped the limit of phenomena, and believed in "a something," whether material or mental, he did it at the sacrifice of his fundamental doctrine.

The fundamental objection of the positivist to a personal idea of God, or theism, is that it is based on the assumption that man can attain to a knowledge of causes, while, according to the positivist theory, causes are wholly inaccessible to human intellect. They lie in a region beyond that which his limited faculties can reach. It deserves to be noted that Comte admits that if reason can rise to the recognition of causes, belief in a divine author of the world becomes inevitable. All arguments of positivists

against causes resolve themselves, at last, into this single one, that they cannot be recognized by the senses. Our senses show us simply succession, not causation, antecedents and consequents, but not causes and effects; and that we know nothing and have a right to believe nothing beyond what the senses teach. These arguments ignore the fact that the mind itself is a factor in knowledge, and that there are laws of thought as well as a constitution of things. Could their doctrine be established there would evidently be no room for religion. But the grounds on which Comte sought to establish it would have given him equally good reason for denying his own existence as for denying the existence of God. The mind cannot know itself as a cause if it cannot recognize cause in nature.

Belief in God was the essence of all that men had been accustomed to call religion. But according to Comte, religion is "the synthetic idealization of our existence." Or, in other words, the worship, not of God, but of humanity. As expressed by Mill, it is "a belief, or a set of beliefs, deliberately adopted, respecting human destiny and duty, to which the believer acknowledges that all his actions ought to be subordinate."

But, as a philosophical system, positivism hardly calls for refutation at the present day. However, the mental attitude which it represents, and which is really very much older than any of the speculations of Comte, still asserts itself and forms the real groundwork of much thinking which passes under other names.

3. Materialism.

Of all the impersonal ideas of God, materialism is the most widespread and the most formidable. It is the central point from which impersonal ideas spring. It would be a grave mistake to suppose that by the term "materialism" is meant any single or definite theory. On the contrary, it covers a variety of hypotheses by no means consistent with one another. Used in its strict and proper sense, the term should denote a theory that seeks to explain the universe by what is known as matter. It is the distinctive characteristic of modern materialism that it exalts matter far above anything that the senses can certify. It does not hesitate to ascribe to matter the attribute of self-existence. It endows it with a vague potency of life.

We see from this how materialism passes beyond the line which positivism essays to draw. Positivism asserts that we can go no further than to recognize those orderly sequences in nature to which we give the name of laws. It refuses to search for causes, and hence denies philosophy. But materialism is a boldly reasoned theory of the universe. It sets itself up as an ultimate and complete explanation of things. The claim for acceptance which it most strongly urges is, that it meets, better than any other system, the legitimate demand of the mind for unity. It explores the ground of things, and seeks to satisfy the intellectual need of a first cause. Assuming that there can be but one ultimate solution of the problem of ex-

istence, rejecting every form of dualism, it looks beyond all secondary and coordinate causes for the supreme principle on which they are all dependent. It is really a philosophy of nature, of the boldest and most comprehensive kind. And whatever judgment we may pass upon it and upon its claims, it is impossible not to recognize the fact that, as a logical method, it is far more adequate than positivism.

Modern materialism is partly a natural reaction from the excessive idealism to which the transcendental philosophy opened the door, but still more a concomitant of the rapid and brilliant progress of physical and especially of biological science. This enormous advance in our knowledge of the organic world has had a marked effect on the scientific spirit.

There was a time when the methods of science were clearly defined, and when in practice they were rigidly adhered to. Science professed to reach her results by processes of induction or deduction, and the line between an ascertained law and an unverified hypothesis was carefully observed. Nothing was more common than to hear from the physicist expressions of contempt for the metaphysician. But with the recent rapid advance of the physical sciences this has been very much changed. The confident assertions that come to us from so many quarters show conclusively that the notion of what constitutes a proof as become extremely confused.

If we ask for a definition of materialism, it may be stated as that system which essays to explain the universe in terms of matter. "In its simplest form," says Patrick, "this theory affirms that there is nothing in the world except matter; that all objects of experience are composed of matter; that mind is either a form of matter, or a function or property of it. Materialists believe that the world is primarily a physical process, and that what we call mind is, so to speak, an incident in the process, a late product of organized matter as the latter appears in the brain of the higher animals."⁴

Thus the universe is exhibited as a homogeneous and coherent system. Without doubt this constitutes for many minds the strongest attraction of the system. It is a thorough system of monism, and conforms to that rational principle which compels us to admit as few causes as possible for a given phenomenon. If we claim for ideas an existence distinct from matter, we are met with the reply that we know nothing of ideas or thoughts except as states of consciousness; that is, special phenomena in the life of men, which are simply the last product of a long natural evolution. Man is a part of nature, and thought is simply part of man.

In its extreme form, materialism affirms that "the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile." This exploded view

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G. T. W. Patrick, The World and Its Meaning, p. 218.

involves the notion that thought is a material substance somehow contained in the brain. In its more refined statement, materialism asserts that thought, feeling, volition, are phenomena of the nervous system.

It is a serious though frequent mistake to think that modern physiology, in its microscopic examination of the brain, has discovered any new clew to the solution of the problem of the relation of the brain to the mind. The evidences of the close connection and interaction of mind and body, or of mental and physical states, are not more numerous or more plain now than they have always been. That fatigue dulls the attention, that narcotics stimulate or stupefy the powers of thought and emotion, that fever may produce delirium, and a blow on the head may suspend consciousness, are facts with which mankind have always been familiar. The influence of the body on the mind is in countless ways manifest. On the contrary, that the physical organism is affected by mental states is an equally common experience. The feeling of guilt sends the blood to the cheek; fear makes the knees quake; joy and love brighten the eye; the will curbs and controls the bodily organs, or puts them in motion.

Not only are the facts on either side familiar to everybody, but no nearer approach has been made towards bridging the gulf between physical states - in particular, molecular movements of the brain - and consciousness. Says Professor Tyndall, "The passage

from the physics of the brain to the corresponding facts of consciousness is unthinkable. Granted that a definite thought and a definite molecular action in the brain occur simultaneously, we do not possess the intellectual organ, nor apparently any rudiment of the organ, which would enable us to pass by a process of reasoning from the one to the other. They appear together, but we do not know why. Were our minds and senses so expanded, strengthened, and illuminated as to enable us to see and feel the very molecules of the brain; were we capable of following their motions, all their groupings, all their electric discharges, if such there be; and were we intimately acquainted with the corresponding states of thought and feeling, - we should be as far as ever from the solution of the problem, How are these physical states connection with the facts of

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consciousness?" There is a class of phenomena which no physical observation is capable of revealing. If the brain of Plato, when he was composing The Republic, had been laid bare and the observer had possessed an organ of vision capable of discerning every movement within it, he would have perceived not the faintest trace of the thoughts which enter into this masterpiece of literature.

Materialism regarded as a theory is self-destructive. If opinion is merely a product of the molecular motion of nervous substance, on what ground is one opinion preferred to another? Is not

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Professor Tyndall, Fragments of Science, p. 121.

one shuffle of atoms as normal as another? If not, by what criterion is one to be approved, and the other rejected? How can either be said to be true or false, when both are equally necessary, and there is no norm to serve as a touchstone of their validity? It is impossible to pronounce one kind of brain normal, and another abnormal; since the rule on which the distinction is to be made is itself a mere product of molecular action, and therefore possessed of no independent, objective validity. To declare a given doctrine true, and another false, when each has the same justification as the rule on which they are judged, is a suicidal proceeding. Like absurdities follow the assertion by a materialist that one thing is morally right, and another morally wrong, one thing noble, and another base, one thing wise, and another foolish. There is no objective truth, no criterion having any surer warrant than the objects to which it is applied. Thus materialism lapses into scepticism. Physiology is powerless to explain the simple fact of sense-perception, or the fundamental feeling at the basis of it. A wave of ether strikes on the retina of the eye. The impact of the ether induces a molecular motion in the optic nerve, which in turn produces a corresponding effect in the sense areas of the brain. On this condition there ensues a feeling; but this feeling, a moment's reflection will show, is something totally dissimilar to the wave-motions which preceded and provoked it. But further, in the act of perception the mind attends to the sensation and compares

one sensation with another. This discrimination is a mental act on which materialism sheds not the faintest ray of light. The facts of memory, of conception and reasoning, the phenomena of conscience, the operations of the will, - of these the materialistic theory can give no reasonable or intelligible account. The materialist is obliged to deny moral freedom. Voluntary action he holds to be necessitated action. The consciousness of liberty with the corresponding feelings of self-approbation or guilt are stigmatized as delusive. No man could have chosen or acted otherwise than in fact he did choose or act, any more than he could have added a cubit to his stature. Of the origin and persistency of these ideas and convictions of the soul, materialism hopelessly fails to give any rational account.

Materialism, as it is usually held at present, starts with the assertion that thoughts are molecular changes. The task which it has to fulfil is that of showing how the former are produced by the latter. How do brain-movements produce thought-movements? If consciousness enters as an effect into the chain of molecular motion, then, by the accepted law of conservation and correlation, consciousness, in turn, is a cause re-acting upon the brain. But this conclusion is directly contrary to the materialistic theory, and is accordingly rejected. It will not do to allow that force is convertible into consciousness. There must be no break in the physical chain. Consciousness is excluded from being a link in this chain.

Consciousness can subtract no force from matter. It will not do to answer that consciousness is the attendant of the motions of matter. What causes it to attend? What is the ground of the parallelism which exists between the series of mental and the series of material manifestations? Is it from the nature of matter that both alike arise? Then, how can thought be denied to be a link in the physical series? If it be some form of being neither material nor mental, the same consequence follows and all the additional difficulties are incurred which belong to the monistic doctrine of Spinoza.

Such are the perplexities which ensue upon the attempt to hold that man is a conscious automaton. They are not avoided by imagining matter to be endowed with mystical and marvellous capacities, which would make it different from itself, and endue it with a heterogeneous nature. Secret potencies, after the manner of the pantheism of the ancients, are attributed to the primeval atoms. "Mind-stuff," or an occult mentality, is imagined to reside in the blood. This is fancy, not science. The reality of a mental subject in which the modes of consciousness have their unity is implied in the language of the materialists, even when they are advocating their theory. The presence of a personal agent by whom thoughts and things are compared, their order of succession observed, and their origin investigated, is constantly assumed.

The view that thoughts originate in the brain cells is untenable. There must be a personal agent. "No fact is so immediate, so real, so irrefutable as the fact of personality."⁶ No better illustration of these two fundamentally opposed conceptions can be found than that given by W. Hanna Thomson. He compares them to two musical instruments, the Aeolian harp and the violin, in the following manner.

"Both the Aeolian harp and the violin are constructed by threads of catgut stretched over apertures in a wooden box. The music of the Aeolian harp comes from it when it is placed where currents of air can flow through its threads, and its notes will then vary according to the direction, the strength and the velocity of the currents. The air which generates the music is a part of the whole outside atmosphere, and while each harp has its own peculiarities of size, number of threads, position, etc., its function source has no peculiarity, but is one and the same in all. In like manner, some hold, currents of thought are excited in the brain by the incoming sensations transmitted from without by the vibrations of the various nerve fibers which are specially adapted to receive impressions, and these vibrations in turn awaken those responses among the fibers and cells of the brain which constitute feelings and ideas.

"On this view a man's brain may be regarded as a specially constructed mechanism whose individual peculiarities in its working, as shown in his daily life, are all due to the arrangement of its material component parts. Some lives give forth long, rich, harmonious notes throughout; others, from unhappy disposition of their fibers, give forth little else than prolonged discords; and others a strange mixture of both; but all these individual, or so-called personal characteristics are matters of cerebral structure, as this is acted upon by the innumerable nerve stimuli proceeding from the outer world. More or less defined conceptions of this kind about the relation of the brain to the mind are quite preva-

lent, particularly among those who emphasize the influence of heredity in the genesis of individual or moral traits. The logical conclusion of this position is, that the mind on the last analysis is the product of the composition and properties of brain matter, and its operations of whatever sort are reactions among the brain elements to the play of external forces.

"The other and essentially different conception is that the brain, if likened to a musical instrument, resembles a violin in that, however good it be as a musical instrument, and however carefully it has to be constructed in all its parts to become such an instrument, yet of itself it cannot give forth a musical note, much less take part in a complex symphony, without a musician to use it. Therefore, though no musician can give us violin music without a violin, so no violin can be musical without a musician. It should be noted that this theory requires mechanism, and the complete integrity of the mechanism, quite as much as the other. In fact, the musical vibrations within the box depend so much for their qualities upon the wood out of which the violin is made that extraordinary sums have been paid for a Stradivarius on that account alone. But though mechanism be such an essential element in both, the entrance of a wholly different factor in the case of the violin, namely, the musician, makes it impossible to harmonize the analogies to brain function drawn from these two instruments. In the one we have ~~the~~ the effects of external forces acting upon material things; while in the other we likewise have material things, but the effects come from a source entirely distinct from and wholly independent of them. We only need now to follow up each of these to their inevitable conclusions to recognize how far apart they are. The one regards the mind as wholly of the brain, and hence the mind can have no existence apart from the brain. The other regards the brain as nothing more than the instrument of the mind, and no instrument can possibly be identical with the agency which uses it."⁷

This latter view, we hold, is the only tenable one. That the mind can have no existence apart from the brain is a false view. The mind must not be confused with the instrument. And the in-

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W. Hanna Thomson, Brain and Personality, pp. 32-36.

strument must not be confused with the agency that uses it.

"Everything involved in our conscious personality, while related to gray matter, is only related to, but not originated by gray matter."⁸ Or as Professor Buckham puts it: "The human brain is a steed with an invisible rider, a machine with an invisible operator, a vessel with an invisible helmsman."⁹

Thus we must distinguish between subject and object, thought and thing, mind and matter, if we are to find a sure foundation for belief in God. That foundation is personality. The fact that "I am" cannot be doubted. And on this fact of our own personality, as we stated at the close of the first chapter, rests the belief in the personality of God.

4. Agnosticism.

Agnosticism, the system of Herbert Spencer, includes disbelief in the personality of God, but also equally in the personality of man. There is of course the verbal admission of a subject and object of knowledge. This distinction, it is even said, is "the consciousness of a difference transcending all other differ-

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W. Hanna Thomson, Brain and Personality, p. 69.

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John Wright Buckham, Personality and the Christian Ideal, p. 86.

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ences." But subject and object, knower and thing known, are pronounced to be purely phenomenal. The reality behind them is said to be utterly incognizable. Nothing is known of it but its bare existence. So, too, we are utterly in the dark as to the relations subsisting among things as distinguished from their transfigured manifestations in consciousness. For these manifestations reveal nothing save the bare existence of objects, together with relations between them which are perfectly inscrutable. The phenomenal are symbols, but they are symbols only in the algebraic sense. They are not pictures, they are not representations of the objects that produce them. They are effects, in consciousness, of unknown agencies. The order in which the effects occur suggests, we are told, a corresponding order in these agencies. But what is "order," what is regularity of succession, when predicated of noumena, but words void of meaning? "What we are conscious of as properties of matter, even down to its weight and resistance, are but subjective affections produced by objective agencies which are un-
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known and unknowable."¹⁰ These effects are generically classified as matter, motion, and force. These terms express certain "likenesses of kind," the most general likenesses, in the subjective affections thus produced. There are certain likenesses of con-

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Herbert Spencer, Principles of Psychology, Vol. I, p. 157.

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Ibid., 493.

nection in these effects, which we class as laws. Matter and motion, space and time, are reducible to force. But force only designates the subjective affection in its ultimate or most general expression. Of force as an objective reality we know nothing. It follows that the same is true of cause and of every other term descriptive of power. There is power, there is cause, apart from our feeling; but as to what they are we are entirely in the dark. "The interpretation of all phenomena in terms of Matter, Motion, and Force, is nothing more than the reduction of our complex symbols of thought to the simplest symbols; and when the equation has been brought to its lowest terms the symbols remain symbols still."¹² Further, the world of consciousness and the world of things as apprehended in consciousness are symbols of a Reality to which both in common are to be attributed. "A Power of which the nature remains forever inconceivable, and to which no limits in Time or Space can be imagined, works in us certain effects."¹³ Thus all our science consists in a classification of states of consciousness which are the product of the inscrutable Cause. It is a "transfigured Realism."

With these views is associated Spencer's doctrine of evolution. Evolution is the method of action of the inscrutable force.

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Herbert Spencer, First Principles, p. 558.

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Ibid., p. 557.

Homogeneous matter diversifies or differentiates itself. The development goes on until nervous organism arises, and reaches a certain stage of complexity where personal consciousness appears, with all its complexity of contents. But consciousness is a growth. All our mental life is woven out of sensations. Intuitions are the product of experience, - not of the individual merely, but of the race, since the law of heredity transmits the acquisitions of the ancestor to his progeny. So mind is built up from rudimentary sensations. The lowest form of life issues at last in the intellect of a Bacon or a Newton. And life, it seems to be held, is evolved from unorganized matter.

According to Spencer's own principles, what are "matter" and "nervous organism" and "life," independently of consciousness, and when there is no consciousness to apprehend them? How can Nature be the source of consciousness, and consciousness in turn be the source of Nature? How are reason, imagination, memory, conscience, and the entire stock of mental experiences of which a Shakespeare or Dante is capable, evolved from nerve-substance? These and like questions we waive, and direct our attention to the doctrine of "the Unknowable."

What is "the Absolute" and "the Infinite" which are declared to be out of the reach of knowledge and which, the moment the knowing faculty attempts to deal with them, lead to manifold contradictions? They are mere abstractions. They have no other than a merely ver-

bal existence. They are reached by thinking away all limits, all conditions, all specific qualities; in short, "the Absolute" as thus described is nothing. If this fictitious absolute be treated as real, absurdities follow.

But this is not the Absolute which Spencer actually places at the foundation of his system. The Absolute which he puts to this use is antithetical to relative being; it is correlated to the relative. Moreover, the Absolute comes within the pale of consciousness, however vague the cognition of it may be. Only so far as we are conscious of it have we any evidence of its reality. Moreover, it is the cause of the relative. It is to the agency of the Absolute that all states of consciousness are referable. "It works in us," says Spencer, "certain effects." Plainly, the real Absolute is related. Only as related in the ways just stated is its existence known. Spencer says himself that the mind must in "some dim mode of consciousness posit a non-relative, and, in some similarly dim mode of consciousness, a relation between it and the relative."¹⁴

Spencer then brings in the principle of CAUSE. The Absolute is the cause of both subject and object. And the idea of cause we derive, according to his own teaching, from the changes of consciousness which imply causation. "The force," he says, "by which we ourselves produce changes, and which serves to symbolize the cause

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Herbert Spencer, Essays, Vol. III, p. 293.

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of changes in general, is the final disclosure of analysis."

In other words, the experience of conscious causal agency in ourselves gives us the idea of "force." This is "the original datum of consciousness." This is all we know of force. Only as we are ourselves conscious of power do we know anything of power in the universe. Spencer chooses to name the ultimate reality "Force" - "the Absolute Force." He declares it to be inscrutable, since the force which we are immediately conscious of is not persistent, but relative. Yet he says that he means by it "the persistence of some cause which transcends our knowledge and conception." Take away cause from the Absolute, and nothing is left. The only cause of which we have any idea is our own conscious activity. If Spencer would make the causal idea, as thus derived, the symbol for the interpretation of "changes in general," he would be a theist. By deftly resolving cause into the physical idea of "force," he gives to his system a pantheistic character. It is only by converting the a priori idea of cause, as given in consciousness, into a "force" which we "cannot form any idea of," and which he has no warrant for assuming, that he avoids belief in a personal God.

According to Spencer, all science is a mental picture to which there is no likeness in realities outside of consciousness. To speak of matter, ether, molecular movements, atoms, time, space,

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Herbert Spencer, First Principles, p. 169f.

motion, cause, force, is to talk in figures without the least knowledge of the realities denoted by them. It is not a case where a symbol is adopted to signify known reality. We cannot compare the reality with the symbol or notion, because of the reality we have not the faintest knowledge. When we speak, for example of the vibrations of the air, we have not the least knowledge either of what the air is or of what vibrations are. We are merely giving name to an unknown cause of mental states. But even of cause itself and of what is meant by its agency in giving rise to effects in us, we are as ignorant as a blind man of colors. Spencer says "that matter is probably composed of ultimate, homogeneous units."¹⁶ He appears, in various places, to think well of the atomic theory of matter. But if he is speaking of matter as it is, independently of our sensations, he forgets the fundamental doctrine of his philosophy. He undertakes to tell us about realities when he cannot consistently speak of anything but their algebraic symbols, or the phenomena of consciousness. The atomic theory of matter carries us as far into the unknown realm of ontology as the doctrine of the personality of the Absolute.

Spencer's system has been correctly described as a union of the positivist doctrine, that we know only the relations of phenomena, with the pantheist assumption of the name of God to denote

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Herbert Spencer, Principles of Psychology, p. 157.

the substance or power which lies beyond phenomena. The doctrine, which is so essential in the system, that mental phenomena emerge from nervous organism when it reaches a certain point of development, is materialistic. Motion, heat, light, chemical affinity, Spencer holds, are transformable into sensation, emotion, thought. He holds that no idea or feeling arises save as a result of some physical force expended in producing it. "How this metamorphosis takes place; how a force existing as motion, heat, or light, can become a mode of consciousness; how it is possible for the forces liberated by chemical changes in the brain to give rise to emotion,
- these are mysteries which it is impossible to fathom."¹⁷ They are mysteries which ought to ^{have} shake the writer's faith in the assumed fact which creates them. If forces liberated by chemical action produce thought, then thought, by the law of conservation, must exert the force thus absorbed by it. This makes thought a link in the chain of causes, giving to it an agency which the theory denies it to possess. If chemical action does not "give rise to" thought by producing it, then it can only be an occasional cause and the efficient cause of thought is left untold. This evolution of mind from matter, even though matter be defined as a mode of "the Unknowable," and the subjection of mental phenomena to material laws, stamp the system as essentially materialistic.

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Herbert Spencer, First Principles, p. 217.

The arguments which confute materialism are applicable to it. These we discussed in the previous chapter, and it is hardly necessary to repeat them here. Suffice it to say that mind and matter are not identical; that there is a personal agent behind all mental processes; and that through this personal agent comes the assurance that God is a living, personal, Being.

The agnostic does not assert or deny the reality of God, but he does deny that God can communicate with us. The absolute and infinite is too far removed from man to make himself known to him. Of course we agree at once that we cannot know God perfectly. But we deny strongly the radical theory of knowledge which asserts man's total incapacity for knowing God and God's total incapacity for revealing himself to man.

5. Impersonal Ideas of Today.

Thus far we have been discussing the impersonal ideas of God held by philosophers and writers of an earlier generation. It now remains to consider the influence of these fundamental conceptions in present-day thought. The current views are not new ideas of God, but new forms of old ideas. For there are only a few fundamental ways of looking at God, man, and the universe.

In the field of psychology there are certain types of thinkers who attempt to reduce man to a mere machine. Among these perhaps the most notable are Sigmund Freud and James B. Watson. Freud considers religion as the product of our desires, and having a useful function in coercing the unintelligent minority. But in the case of the more intelligent it should be superseded by a nonreligious education. He maintains that psychoanalysis as clearly proved that the idea of God originates in a father-complex formed in infancy. Thus, religious experience is a reconciliation of the individual with his own subconscious father-image. Watson opposes psychoanalysis at nearly every point except its denial of God. He even wishes to do away with consciousness, and ascribes the origin of belief in consciousness to a kind of "subtle religious psychology." Religious beliefs arise from fear stimuli. Watson's theory thus requires disbelief in a personal God. If there is no human consciousness, there cannot be a divine consciousness.

Turning from the psychologists to the philosophers, we find many ways of arriving at the denial of God. Bertrand Russell, for instance, finds no necessity either for the belief in a personal God or for the religious attitude. He is so convinced of the error of belief in God that he does not even take pains to make a detailed refutation. To the ordinary reader he apparently bases his philosophy on the presupposition that there is no God.

George Santayana is another disbeliever in a personal God. His philosophy seems to reflect the conflict between the poet in him, and the skeptic. He says: "My matured conclusion has been that no system is to be trusted, not even that of science in any literal or pictorial sense; but all systems may be used and, up to a certain point, trusted as symbols. Science expresses in human terms our dynamic relation to surrounding reality. Philosophies and religions, where they do not misrepresent these same dynamic relations and do not contradict science, express destiny in moral dimensions, in obviously mythical and poetical images: but how else should these moral truths be expressed at all in a traditional or popular fashion? Religions are the great fairy-tales of the conscience."¹⁸ Thus the conflict between the two selves within him, the poet and the skeptic, is solved by assigning to the poet the realm of imagination, symbols and essences, and to the skeptic the realm of reality. Religion ac-

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George Santayana, "Brief History of my Opinions," in Contemporary American Philosophy edited by G. P. Adams, p. 244.

cordingly falls wholly within the poet's domain and has only symbolic and imaginative value.

S. Alexander's idea of God is based on metaphysics which connects him with value and relates him to human life, but denies his personality. He teaches that the whole order of things has developed out of pure space. This space gradually keeps acquiring higher and higher qualities or levels. In this advance from pure space it has produced matter, life, and consciousness; but there are still new qualities ahead. Alexander gives the name of deity to the fact that there is always a higher level coming. "Spirit, personality, mind, - all these human and mental characters belong to God but not to deity,"¹⁹ for deity always is what lies beyond the present stage of development. This does not mean that God is a person; it means only that human personality, being a part of the universe, is a part of God; but God has no consciousness of his own beyond what is possessed by conscious beings in the world. God is not value, but "all values are conserved in God's deity." In this conception of God Alexander seems to be asserting and denying God at the same time. We know nothing about the next level above humanity, yet we know that it will be better than consciousness. This whole view seems to be based on speculation rather than on logic.

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S. Alexander, Space, Time, and Deity, Vol. II, p. 349.

E. G. Spaulding, a neo-realist, presents another impersonal view of God. He contends that our human experiences of value reveal a realm of value beyond man. Justice, love, mercy, and all ideal values make up this realm. Our experience of justice reveals an eternal justice and love. This justice and love are considered as impersonal principles, not as the conscious will of a personal God. He holds that "the Good is efficient in influencing men to action and in leading them to be their best and highest selves,"²⁰ But this Good is an immaterial force. In another place he says: "Just as the science of mechanics does not logically allow of a cause that is first in time and uncaused, or of a creator who makes something out of nothing, so does evolution render at least superfluous the conception of a being who, external to and distinct from the universe, is nevertheless its architect, its designer,²¹ or its purposer." Thus Spaulding recognizes a power in the universe, but it is not a personal Being.

One of the most brilliant minds of today is Walter Lippmann. Properly speaking he is a humanist, which does not necessarily deny personality. In fact the humanist seems to believe in the personality of man, and to deny the personality of an external Being. But Lippmann is unique in that he does not attempt to disprove the idea

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E. D. Spaulding, What Am I? p. 256.

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Ibid., p. 268.

of God. He simply assumes the existence of a large number of people who have abandoned their faith in a personal God. This is unquestionably true, but does not furnish a solid foundation upon which to construct a philosophy as Lippmann as attempted. Since we are dealing with impersonal ideas we can do no more than mention Lippmann, his system not being essentially impersonal.

But since we have mentioned Lippmann it would not seem right not to mention John Dewey, who also has challenged our beliefs concerning God even though he cannot strictly be considered as an impersonalist. Dewey's chief objection to God is that God takes our attention from action and directs it on the eternal and unchangeable. While Dewey does not seem to have much sympathy with the idea of a personal God, he seems to have an appreciation of the essential part of theism, which we gather from the following words: "Within the flickering inconsequential acts of separate selves dwells a sense of the whole which claims and dignifies them. In its presence we put off mortality and live in the universal."²²

If the whole tendency of our age were opposed to the idea of God as a living, personal Being, that fact alone would not prove that belief in a Personal God was untrue. But it is a mistaken notion that the whole tendency of the present is hostile to

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John Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct, in The Problem of God by Edgar S. Brightman, p. 55.

belief in a personal God. Professor Brightman summarizes the situation in the following words: "We are, indeed, living in an age in which all fundamental beliefs are being challenged. In the past, theism and materialism or naturalism have stood over against each other. Traditional theism has been treated very roughly; but it has not been subjected to any worse treatment than has naturalism. We have spoken of doubt about God as a mark of the age; it is equally correct to speak of doubt about materialism as a mark of the age. The advance of modern physics has ruined the smug solidity of the old-fashioned atom and the tight mechanism of nineteenth-century theory. Relativity, the quantum theory, and the amazing advances in our knowledge of atomic structure, all contribute to making nineteenth-century physics, on which materialism was based, appear the
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artificial and insufficient abstraction that it was."

Thus the advance of science has rendered the old-fashioned materialism obsolete. The atoms have been superseded by electron-proton systems. Mechanism and determinism can no longer be held as an acceptable bases for philosophy. "The old foundations of scientific thought are becoming unintelligible," says A. N. Whitehead.
24 He further adds, "What is the sense of talking about the mechanical explanation when you do not know what you mean by mech-

23 Edgar S. Brightman, The Problem of God, p. 30.

24 A. N. Whitehead, Science and the Modern World in The Problem of God, by Edgar S. Brightman, p. 31.

anics?" Bertrand Russell says, "Physics must be interpreted in a way which tends towards idealism, and perception in a way which tends towards materialism. I believe that matter is less material and mind less mental than is commonly supposed."²⁵

From these statements of contemporary thinkers it is evident that the tendency of modern physics and philosophy is away from the mechanistic and the materialistic ideas of past generations. It seems that even science itself is beginning to recognize the reality of mind and spirit, which is a hopefull sign of what may be accomplished in man's attempt to know more fully the universe in which he lives and its Maker.

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Bertrand Russell, "The Analysis of Matter," in The Problem of God, by Edgar S. Brightman, p. 31.

III. PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS RELATED TO THE CHRISTIAN VIEW

While the impersonal ideas of God which we have been discussing are inadequate, the Personal God of Christianity is adequate. Before discussing the Christian view it may be well to point out briefly how it relates to philosophic world-views in general. The former holds, on the most solid grounds, that God is one, personal, spiritual, righteous, loving, purposive, and redemptive. Professor Brightman puts it this way. "God is a conscious Person of perfect good will. He is the source of all value and so ¹ worthy of worship and devotion." This is the religious conviction as to God. Philosophy seeks to explain the nature of being as a whole, the relations of mind and matter, God's relations to the physical universe, and deals indeed with all the ultimate problems of thought. With many of these religion is only indirectly concerned. There is therefore no necessary conflict between the interests of thought in these ultimate forms and the interests of religion. Religion should not attempt to curb the intellect, nor should the intellect attempt to force world-views upon the religious man which are subversive of religion itself. In the last resort the two interests are identical. Man's activity in each

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Edgar S. Brightman, The Problem of God, p. 113.

sphere is the necessary complement to his activity in the other. But pending his attainment of the ultimate goal of thought and the complete unity of all the elements of life, we must stand for the principle of freedom both for the religious and for the intellectual life of man. This point may be made clear by reminding ourselves that our experience of God in Christ may be interpreted for both ends of the religious life, in which case it becomes a system of theology; or it may be interpreted for the ends of the general world-view, in which case it becomes a system of metaphysics. Theology inevitably and invariably runs back to metaphysics. But there are problems in metaphysics whose solution is not essential to religion or theology.

Of all the systems of philosophy personalism most nearly approaches the Christian view. The first thing to be observed is the relation of personalism to the biblical teachings concerning God. The biblical representations of God are non-speculative. They do not deal with questions of ontology. The Scriptures are not philosophic in their dealing with the facts of religion. The Christian conception as taught in the New Testament is in its chief essentials paralleled by personalism. The Christian view is that God is the infinite Spirit, personal, holy, loving, purposive, immanent in the world, and transcendent. Personalism is in exact agreement with the New Testament in these respects. The point at which personalism goes beyond the Christian view is its

monistic tendency. Personalism seeks to explain matter from the point of view of a spiritual world-ground. It comes nearer to success in this respect than any other form of modern philosophic thought. But it does not remove all the difficulties, and until it does this it need not be regarded as having reached its final form. But personalism is unlike the monistic systems generally in certain fundamental particulars. It insists upon the reality of human personality. It combats the pantheistic tendency to make man a transient phase of the impersonal and eternal substance. It insists upon the personality of God. It is on this basis that it explains man's personality. It insists upon human freedom. It insists on purpose as the controlling factor in nature and history. It insists on freedom and immortality. It insists upon man's capacity for God and the possibility of fellowship between the Infinite and finite persons.

It thus appears that personalism conserves the Christian values while it goes beyond the Christian teaching at certain points. The Christian interest has nothing to lose in welcoming every effort of man's intellect to explain the ultimate meaning of the world. As men increase in knowledge and wisdom and widen their experience, they gradually approach the Christian view of the world. Personalism is one of the finest flowers of philosophic thought to-day. "Among the richest fruits of personalism is the newer and

firmer basis for theism which it furnishes."² It is interesting to observe the close affinity of personalism with our Christian conception of God. "Just as Divine Fatherhood is the characteristic Christian conception of God religiously, so, it may be said, is its counterpart, Perfect Personality, the characteristic Christian concept philosophically."³

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J. W. Buckham, Personality and the Christian Ideal, p. 206.

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J. W. Buckham, The Humanity of God, p. 64.

IV. THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF GOD

The idea of Divine personality is as old as religion. But Christianity has laid more stress upon personality as applied to God than any other religion. Dean Knudson says "that God was personal before he was regarded as absolute or as perfectly good."⁴ Such was the case with the Jahvah of the Old Testament. But in those times the question of divine personality did not arise, for the metaphysical definition of personality did not yet exist, though the fact was acted upon as consistently as in any age. But if the term "personality" had arisen we can see how prophets and apostles would have answered it.

The Christian conception of God emphasizes the personality of God. But what do we mean when we speak of God as personal? Belief in the personality of God rests upon belief in our own personality. "A person is a being in relation with others, who is aware of himself and has power of directing his own action. Evidently such personality is an ever-growing thing, never complete, always becoming. Self-consciousness is never perfect, for a human being is never conscious of all that is in him. Self-direction is always limited, for there is much in life that a person does not determine

4

Albert C. Knudson, The Doctrine of God, p. 286.

for himself; and the relations of a human being are not all determined by himself, are not fully known to him, and can never be utilized by him to the full possible extent."⁵

Reaching the idea of personality in God from that of our own personality, we must observe certain differences. "We have an incomplete self-consciousness, but in God we think of it as complete, or consciousness of all that the self-knowing One contains. We know self-direction, applied to parts of our action, but in God we think of it as unhindered and perfect, governing all that he does. We know relations with other beings, which in our case are partly chosen and partly accepted, whether we will or not, but in God we think of them as appointed by himself, entered and maintained in full independence. In God the elements of personality are carried up to perfection. In tracing the process we have transcended the range of humanity, but not the nature of personality. The God whom we discover is a personal being in the same sense with us, notwithstanding that his personality rises above ours by the height of perfection."⁶

The distinctive feature of the Christian view is the self-revelation of God in the domain of human history. Along with this the revelation is made real and vital for men in the realm of per-

5

William N. Clarke, The Christian Doctrine of God, p. 63.

6

Ibid., p. 64f.

sonal experience. If we now ask the question, why the self-revelation of God took this form, and keep in mind the needs and requirements of religion itself, a satisfactory answer is not far to seek.

In the first place, a human personality is the only adequate medium for the self-revelation of a personal God. Only personality can fully reveal and express the meaning of personality. Of course there are many intimations and suggestions of personality to be found in the physical universe. But those are not sufficient in themselves to express all the wealth of meaning in the nature of the infinite personal God. The moral qualities of God especially call for a personal, moral life in order that they may be clearly and fully expressed. The lower stages of nature, it seems, give rise to the expectation of a personal being as the crown of nature. And if God is to make himself fully known to men who, in the exercise of their freedom came under the dominion of sin, it is most natural to expect that he would disclose himself to such personal beings in the form of a personal life.

Again, the personal and historical revelation of God was necessary to complete and establish firmly the inward revelation through his Spirit. In other words, it was necessary to save religion from the uncertainties and perils of subjectivism. So long as religion was without an objective ground, it was always exposed to the danger that it would fail to attain the stability and de-

finiteness required by the religious life itself. Man must really know God if the idea and power of God are to bear their highest moral fruits in human life.

Another reason for such a self-revelation of God is that the deed of love and of righteousness is a far more powerful revelation of these qualities in God than the simple declaration of them could be. The Scriptures declare that God is love. They show also that he is righteousness. It is clear, therefore, that if God is such a being in his essential nature, a mere declaration of the fact would not constitute a real demonstration of it. To become love and righteousness in action would be the only adequate revelation of the fact of love and righteousness in God's essential nature. The incarnation of God in Christ was the only adequate means for a self-disclosure.

Again, such a revelation was required in order to the production of the necessary results in the moral and spiritual nature of man. This point becomes clear when we consider the insufficiency of any other form of revelation for the end in view. Miracles and outward wonders alone would not meet the need. They were employed for a time in order to awaken in men a sense of God's presence. But they were always employed for moral and personal ends. In themselves, however, they were never an adequate means of creating in men the full religious response to God. A man might indeed be convinced of God's presence and activity in an intellectual way by won-

ders and signs, and remain untouched in the depths of his moral nature. But this is not the chief end of the gospel. That end is not understood until we perceive that in his self-revelation in Christ God's intention was to produce the "response of moral qualities in man to moral qualities in God." His end was to produce sons of God worthy in all respects of their Father. For this purpose Jesus Christ revealed the inner nature of God as righteous love and became the medium through whom the power of God could reach personal beings and reproduce the same qualities in them. Thus the Divine love awakened human love. For the first time man understood clearly and fully the moral nature of God.

The revelation of Christ completes the idea of God. In Christ we find the union of the immanent and transcendent principles. Jesus Christ brings God near in a human life. Christ's revelation of God was not primarily the communication of truths about God. It was rather the embodiment in a human life of the reality of the Divine life. The truths arose out of the facts about God.

The revelation of God in Christ makes known to us in most impressive form the personality of God. God is a Person. In nature and history there are dim revelations of God. He appeared as Law, as Force, as Life, as Purpose, as moral Principle, and in other ways. But these are partial and fragmentary revelations. The stages in the revelation of God could reach their climax only in the highest medium known to us, personality. All the lower forms of the revela-

tion are thus unified in the personality of God as revealed in Christ.

Again, Jesus Christ reveals God by demonstrating what God is in himself by outward act. God is love. Without this he would not be God. A mere declaration to us that he is love would not and could not be a revelation of God as love. "We can find a God of Love only in some concrete Person who is divine enough to reveal such perfect traits of character and human enough to be identified with us. All that and more we find in Christ."⁷

Thus, it appears that what God is cannot be learned by philosophic speculations, but through the revelation of Christ. "Only through a personal Life like that could a God be revealed who would meet all our needs and be completely adequate for us as the Life,⁸ the Truth, and the Way."

7

Rufus M. Jones, "The Eternal Goodness" in Joseph Fort Newton's My Idea of God, p. 59.

8

Ibid., p. 59.

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